UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.109/1151
11 June 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION
WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING
OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL
COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

MILITARY ACTIVITIES AND ARRANGEMENTS BY COLONIAL POWERS IN TERRITORIES UNDER THEIR ADMINISTRATION WHICH MIGHT BE IMPEDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

1. Basic information on political, economic and social conditions in the United States Virgin Islands is contained in the general working paper prepared for the current session of the Special Committee (A/AC.109/1150). Supplementary information on military activities and arrangements in the Territory is set out below. 1/

2. In 1967, the Government of the United States of America transferred possession of its former naval base on St. Thomas (an area of 80 hectares) to the territorial Government, but retained the right to reoccupy the facility. At present, the United States Navy maintains a radar and sonar calibration station on St. Croix and an underwater tracking station off its west coast. The United States Coast Guard maintains a detachment on St. Thomas. The United States Virgin Islands National Guard, which is affiliated with the United States Army, also has its headquarters on St. Thomas. In addition, a permanent recruitment station for the United States armed forces is based on St. Thomas and a recruitment centre for the United States Marine Corps was established on St. Croix in April 1988.

3. It was reported in June 1992, that a Civil Air Patrol, an auxiliary of the United States Air Force, was in operation in the Territory. The programme, which is open to citizens and legal residents between the ages of 13 and 18 years, offers training in such areas as first aid, aerospace and leadership. Cadets who pass the 100-question Mitchell test can enter the military as a private first class, one rank ahead of other recruits. There are currently approximately 40 cadets in the programme. 2/

United States Navy

4. It will be recalled that, in February 1991, the territorial Government had entered into an agreement with the United States Navy for the latter's use of a facility on St. John for the testing of non-hazardous equipment. According to press reports later in the same year, the United States Navy planned to spend approximately US$ 9 million on two projects on St. Croix: reconstruction of the Range Operations Center at St. George Hill, which would cost US$ 6.5 million; and work on the Soonobuoy Quality Assurance Laboratory at Ham's Bluff, which would total approximately US$ 2.3 million. Both facilities had been destroyed by Hurricane Hugo in 1989. It was also reported that the Navy had planned to install a new radar system on Crown Mountain on St. Thomas. The Multiple Object Tracking Radar system, on loan to the Navy for six months by the United States Army missile testing site in New Mexico, would be used to monitor training exercises in the Caribbean.

5. The following developments were reported during the period under review. The first phase of the construction of the permanent stations for the Navy's Range Operations Center and Soonobuoy Quality Assurance Laboratory were in progress in June 1992 and the second phase was expected to start at the beginning of July. The new structures on St. Croix would replace trailers which had been used by the Navy for several years. Construction of the two facilities was expected to be completed, inspected and approved by November 1993. 3/

6. It was reported in July 1992 that as a result of reductions in United States military installations, the naval testing facility at Ham's Bluff on the west coast of St. Croix might be closed within nine months. A spokesperson for the Naval Air Warfare Center at Indianapolis, Indiana, which oversees the St. Croix facility, stated that closure of the facility appeared increasingly likely. The spokesperson noted, however, that the Ham's Bluff lighthouse, a local landmark at the testing site, would not be affected by the cut-backs. The agreement by the Navy to provide power to the lighthouse would continue, whether or not the testing facility was closed. 4/

7. In September 1992, the naval facilities' Engineering Command informed Mr. Ron de Lugo, the Territory's delegate to the United States Congress, that it would implement his request to advertise construction bids in the Territory and would forward copies of plans and specifications to his local office. This arrangement was reached following a request by Mr. De Lugo for a postponement of the opening of the bids for the two naval facilities on St. Croix, after it was learned that no advertisements had been placed locally and that few local contractors were aware of the construction bids. 5/

8. The Territory continued to be a port of call for United States naval vessels and those of its allies. Between 40,000 and 50,000 sailors visit the Territory each year. In May 1992, five vessels of the Netherlands Navy with a total of 1,011 officers and other ranks visited St. Croix, and, in July, the USS Nassau, a helicopter courier, visited St. Thomas.

United States Coast Guard

9. The United States Coast Guard continued to maintain a detachment on St. Thomas and to patrol the waters of the Territory including, under a special arrangement, those of the neighbouring British Virgin Islands.

10. In March 1993, there were 33 members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary on St. Thomas. The Auxiliary, a volunteer non-military organization, was created by the United States Congress in 1939, to assist the United States Coast Guard in promoting safety on the waterways. No data were reported for the St. Croix chapter of the Auxiliary.

Virgin Islands National Guard

11. As previously reported (A/AC.109/1110, para. 6), in December 1991 the United States Congress had approved legislation introduced by the Territory's delegate to Congress which would allow the Governor to appoint the Commander of the National Guard. According to the local press, the legislation, which had been well received in the Territory, was considered to be long overdue and a necessary step towards self-government. It will be recalled that, early in 1990, the Governor had expressed his displeasure over the circumstances surrounding the appointment of the head of the Virgin Islands National Guard by the President of the United States. The Governor had noted with concern that the Territory was one of only two jurisdictions where the appointment of the head of the National Guard had been made by the President of the United States, and not by the Governor (for further details, see A/AC.109/1030, paras. 8-13).

12. In June 1992, the new Virgin Island National Guard (VING) armory on St. Thomas was opened. The completed structure will house the 786th Battalion. The VING armory on St. Croix was inaugurated in March 1991. 6/

United States Army

13. No additional information was reported on the investigation by the United States Army Corps of Engineers on whether chemical and conventional weapons stored on Water Island in 1942 were still on that island (see A/AC.109/1109, para. 41).

Other developments

14. In March 1993, representatives from the Territory attended the Ninth Caribbean Islands Nations Conference held at Port-of-Spain. The Conference discussed regional military training, peace-keeping and disaster-preparedness, among other issues. It was attended by 70 officers from military and police forces from the region and observers from Canada, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. 7/

Notes

1/ The information contained in the present paper has been derived from published reports.

2/ The Daily News (United States Virgin Islands), 3 June 1992.

3/ St. Croix Avis, 14-15 June 1992.

4/ The Daily News (United States Virgin Islands), 4 July 1992.

5/ Ibid., 11 September 1992.

6/ Ibid., 11 June 1992.

7/ The Sunday Guardian (Port-of-Spain), 28 March 1993.